From four-piece to three, and after hard times in Ireland

THIN LIZZY—NEXT SLADE?

by charles webster

THE OLDER generation may complain that rock music depraves and corrupts young minds, but we all know deep down that it's good for the soul, don't we?

One of the most frustrating wars the world has known is in Northern Ireland, where man seems to be senselessly destroying himself, but three men from the emerald isle have come together to make music and peace in their homeland.

Thin Lizzy is their name and they have a number one hit in Ireland with Whiskey In The Jar, which was a chart topper on Radio Luxembourg and is bubbling around the British charts. Amazingly, In The Jar is enjoying its second spell at the top in Ireland after falling to number two a few weeks ago.

Situation

"We play mainly in the South but we do a few gigs in Ulster" bass guitarist and lead singer Phil Lynott told me. "It's a bit difficult to get work in the North these days because all the venues are being blown up. There's not much you can do about the situation at home because it's like a historical thing and I can see no end to it all as there's so much bitterness on both sides."

Phil is about the only coloured Irishman in the business, and like Brian Downey, the drummer, he hails from Dublin, while guitarist Eric Bell comes from Belfast. But they've hit a happy note and they are all the best of pals.

Lizzy was formed two years ago in Dublin as a fourpiece band.

"Things were so hard at the time that we had to cut down to a three-piece act" said Eric. "We just couldn't afford to live as a four-piece . Most of the bands in Ireland are the showbands and they are a really stuck up breed. Our organist didn't want to join one of them so he split to Sweden."

Eric worked for a while in Them, a band who were quite ahead of their time, with Van Morrison. "I always thought Van would be successful. He had the right personality and never sang the same way twice. He ad libbed every night and was years in front of anybody else."

Phil was once singer with Skid Row before they left Ireland. "They were into a big intricate thing which is no good at all for a singer. I took some bass lessons from Brush in Skid Row and then took it up with Thin Lizzy."

Decca scouts found the band in good old Oireland and brought the Thin Lizzy to London to cut an album. "When we finished it we were going home" said Phil, "But somebody offered us some gigs so we stayed. There appears to be great respect in this country for Irish musicians."

Target

What with Phil being a darker shade of white and the whole band being Irish they become the target for all kinds of racial abuse.

"We tell Irish jokes on stage" said Phil. "After all, if you can't laugh at yourself, who can you laugh at?"

Apart from hearing that first album, the first time I came across Thin Lizzy was during their British tour when they were supporting Slade. I caught their Rainbow gig, when both bands were on top form, and with Lizzy getting an exceptionally good reception for a relatively unknown band. How did they come to get on the tour, which was a great boost for any band in that position?

"We first played with Slade at a festival on the Isle of Arran and coming home we had a chat with them and the guy who was promoting the tour" said Phil. "He gave Slade a list of names of groups who wanted to appear on the tour and they picked us.

"The tour went really well but Liverpool was a bit of a heavy night because most of the kids had just come from a football match and were really excited."

"It was a bit difficult for us as the support band because they only wanted Slade. A few kids threw sticks and cans at us and at one point four cans hit me almost at the same time. We felt a bit stupid.

"It was like the old Beatles tours when there was a lot of energy in the atmosphere. Slade are probably the only band around who know how to harness it. In the same way, if the Beatles could go from lyrics like I Wanna be Your Man. to the Sgt Pepper album, just give Slade a few years and they'll probably do the same."

So don't forget folks, that while Slade are becoming the new Beatles keep an eye open for Thin Lizzy. Maybe they'll become the new Slade.